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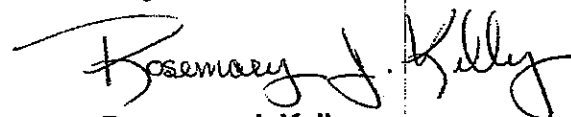
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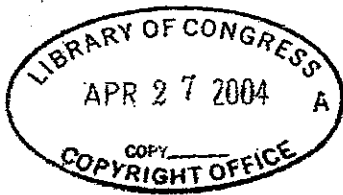
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Deborah J. Thomas

Squisher the Fish

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TXu1-175-008



Once upon a time not so long ago, the sea began to sparkle as a life began to bloom. The tides of the ocean, when directed by the moon, swirl life into spaces in this place of constant motion.

So begins the story of Squisher the fish. A beauty of an Angelfish, a Rock Beauty that is. Out of an egg hatched this tiny yellow fish. At the edge of a reef, in a pile of rocks, Squisher found a hole to call his very own. Squisher slept wonderfully throughout the night. All too soon it was morning as the sun took the night. Squisher awoke curious and hungry for a bite. The sounds were calling him to venture, so he swam towards the light. Wow! Squisher was astounded, peering out of his hole, bright and wonderful, everything in sight. A rainbow of colors, fish of all kinds, eating and meeting, swimming left and right.

That's when Squisher said to a Redlip Blenny named Glen, "It's a pleasure to meet you I hope we can be friends. I'd like someone to teach me and tell me what is what." Glen smiled a big grin and began "I'd love to help you out, just follow me along the way and we'll eat and sing and play, play, play." The little Blenny sang this song:

(Squisher the Fish)

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There are rocks and sponges, coral reef and sand,
sea whips, sea fans and sea aneomes.
An octopus has eight arms, a starfish only five.
It is wonderful to be here, it is great to be alive!

A butterfly-fish can't really fly,
and needlefish can't sew.
Now invertebrates you'll like to eat...
alga is a most necessary treat...
But I wouldn't eat a jellyfish
or squeeze a Lemon Shark!

Trumpetfish aren't in a band,
and Parrotfish can't sing...
Oh I'd like to ride a Seahorse
to rescue a Damselfish!

There are Doctorfish and Surgeonfish,
the Nurse Shark is pretty cool.
The Jewfish is a giant, it grows to be eight feet!
There are Jewelfish and Jacknifes, all around the reef.
The Jawfish is a small fish, hiding in the sand.

There are Blue, Grey, French and Queen... Angelfish,
Queen Triggerfish, Queen Parrotfish to be seen.
I've seen Pigfish and Goatfish,
and a Squirrelfish with no tail...
Hogfish and Houndfish, a Catfish with a sail...
But what I want to I've never never see,
is the Polka-dot Batfish!

Look there is a Spotted Drum,
he's really kind of shy...
Oh you must see the giant Manta Ray,
through the air he jumps to fly!
There are Whales and Dolphins
and hundreds more to name.

Now the strangest thing I've ever ever seen
is the creature from above...
They sometimes snorkle silent
or diving deeper, blowing bubbles,
making noise and causing chaos...
Searching sponges, rocks and coral...
Sometimes taking us away!
Look out for these strange one's...
Because it is wonderful to be here.
It is great to be alive!

(Squisher the Fish)

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And the two fish swam along the reef, one teaching and one learning. Both were singing "It is wonderful to be here, it is great to be alive!" Then Glen stopped and smiled, his eyes were fixed. "Oh there she is, a sight to see, my one true love, her name is Emily. On her reef we will dine, I plan to care for her and make her mine."

Young Squisher had many unanswered questions by now. "What is love?" he asked. Glen grinned with delight and began "It is love that makes you feel whole, you quiver inside and you long to be near. Your heart feels warm with the mate for your soul. When love gets you, you will know."

Just as Squisher was about to ask the question most on his mind, Glen darted quick and fast, a huge shadow came up from behind. Glen said "Squisher swim over here! It's those creatures from above. We'll stay hidden in here until it's safe and clear." The two fish swam under the reef until they came upon a cave. "This looks pretty creepy" said Squisher to his friend. "Yes it does" said Glen "It's the home of a Spotted Moray Eel. Let's find another way so we don't become a bite in his next meal." No sooner than this was said, the eel shot out of his hole with his mouth open wide. He lunged at Glen. A near miss it was, a close call indeed. The chase went on as the two looked for a new place to hide. The wish came true for the frightened two, a tiny hole and a chance for them to escape.

After the fish were safe in a hole, Glen sighed with relief and began "Now Squisher my friend it is time for you to see an

(Squisher the Fish)

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important part of our community. We all have a purpose in the chain of life, we all play a role in our world beneath the sea. There is a place where you can work and be safe, there's plenty to eat and many friends you can make. It's a reef cleaning station that is set up by the Gobies. You can go see for yourself, all you do is clean the fish along your shelf." Little Squisher thought hard and said "Well what are we waiting for? Just lead the way, I can start today, I'm hungry for a snack and..." Glen interrupted "Hold on just a minute, there is more you need to know. Some of the fish you will service are larger than you so beware! Learn all you can from the Gobies, Wrasses and Angels. Now it is time for me to go, I believe you'll have great fun! Glen took Squisher to his new work station and left him with a friend, William the Neon Goby. Glen said "Good luck my friend, I'll see you at the days end, I'm off to court my belle."

Squisher made friends while eager to play. The first one he met was a chubby young Grouper called Mr. Grubbs. He spoke of hunters he had seen yesterday, they had sharp spears of silver shining in the sun. So frightened of the divers, Mr. Grubbs swam all night long. You see a spear pierced the fin of Squisher's new found friend, although his wound will heal, his fear will not as swiftly mend. As the two pals were exchanging fish stories they were interrupted by a girls soft voice. "Dot is my name, hey you know we look the same." A Rock Beauty she is, a cutie indeed. "Can you show me the sights and a safe place to live?"

(Squisher the Fish)

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Squisher said "Sure I can, you can stay with me and I'll help you all I can. I will share what I know and together we can grow and explore." Well together Squisher and Dot did so. There was fun and adventure, exploration and invention. The two were a perfect match.

Early one morning Squisher awoke to find Dot very upset. "What's the matter?" he said. Dot turned and sighed "My beautiful blue circle is begining to fade." Squisher felt bad to see her sad. Then he noticed that his blue circle was also beginning to dissapear. "I guess it's a part of our growing up. But I must say that your blue eyes are more beautiful than ever before!" Well this made Dot feel happy again. You see the two fish were falling in love.

One beautiful day the pair planned to meet Glen and Emily and search for a new place to play. As the four headed south to explore this part of their reef, a Loggerhead Turtle swam to them and said "Frankie is my name and catching lobster is my game! Can you tell me is you've seen any? I won't eat them all, just as many as need to fill my belly... and maybe a jellyfish or two. Squisher pointed his fin and said "I saw some to the north under a huge brain coral just past a fork in the reef." Friendly but furious in his search, Frankie bid farewell and promptly paddled away.

The four companions wanted to play a new game. Hide and seek was now the plan. It was not surprising that Squisher wished to be the first to seek. The Blennies hid behind a nearby

(Squisher the Fish)

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giant sponge while Dot dashed under the reef. Just as Squisher was beginning his search, a school of tangs passed by. Some were yellow, some were blue, and a parrotfish or two, three, four and five. Watching the fish flowing by gave Squisher a splendid thought, it is so beautiful here, it must be paradise. "Hey Glen! Hey Dot! Hey Emily!" he shouted. The Blennies peeked out and Dot swam out and said "What's the matter my dear?" Squisher grinned and began to sing this song:

I feel that I must say,
to you on this glorious day...
it is wonderful to be here, it is great to be alive!
Now I know what our purpose is about...
It is to love one another, to help each other out.
To live each waking moment for the best that it can be!

To share anothers joy,
to take away their tears of pain,
and fade away their fears...
Because it is wonderful to be a friend,
it makes you feel alive!

To laugh when you can- loudly...
To do whatever is right...
And try the best you can!
Let's share the beauty of our living ocean shelf!

My friends and I will play...
among seafans, rocks and coral...
I feel so much pleasure, peace and pride...
It is wonderful to know you,
it is great to feel alive!

The four fish found their way back to the game of hide and seek. The day grew long as the time flew by. The four friends found fun for sure! As they were headed home, Squisher spotted some delicious sponges and the Blennies found lots of leafy greens. They dined with much delight. A perfect dinner for four hefty appetites.

(Squisher the Fish)

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Suddenly, seeming out of nowhere, appeared a large human shape of shadow. Before she knew what was happening, Dot was scooped into a net. Squisher heard her call for help and rushed to her to help. As he approached the edge of the sponge filled shelf he came face to face with the human race. And what a face it was. The eyes were huge, the arms reached out spreading far and creating fear. Squisher turned to get away as he felt the net block the way. No matter the direction he swam to get out, the holes were too small for him to escape.

Frozen with fear, Dot grew silent and still. Squisher told her "Don't worry, I'm with you. Don't be afraid, I believe they mean no harm." The two Rock Beauties were being taken to the surface as they heard their friends say "It is wonderful to know you. It has been our pleasure and pride."

Squisher and Dot were taken to a place above the sea. The sun was so bright and the air was so dry. Large white puffy clouds were floating in the sky. What is this place? the two fish wondered. So near to their home, yet so far from what they've known, this world above the sea.

The two Rock Beauties were joined by many other fish and taken on a journey until the sea turned into land. They were packed and moved then put in glass tanks of water. Scared and hungry for two days in a row, their future uncertain. Where will they go? To be cared for by humans and protected from harm. That is their future, beginning today.

(Squisher the Fish)

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Squisher was unsure what to think when settling into his new home, a tank. A Blue Chromis was there, along with a Jawfish pair. They were friendly it seemed, and the water was clean. But the scared little Squisher hid under a rock. After hours went by, he came out to be seen, as the food poured in from above. A young boy was there, smiling at the new fish he had acquired. Squisher was home at last! He was safe and happy to be protected from harm. He is now the king of his world, in this public aquarium.

I often wonder what it is to be a fish, captured from his world against his wish. To see a creature not like yourself, swim out of the shadow of a deep coral shelf. To take you away to the world up above, not knowing what's to happen apart from the home you love. They can teach us and flourish, because knowledge can nourish. For tropical fish which live in tanks, their world now in ours, their world in our hands. Take care of our oceans. Take care of our lands.